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Environment and sustainable development: Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Report of the Secretary-General

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–2	2
II.	Review of progress	3–21	2
	A. Vulnerability index	3–7	2
	B. Modalities for resource mobilization	8–10	3
	C. Small island developing States technical assistance programme and information network	11–12	3
	D. Natural disasters	13–17	3
	E. Energy in small island developing States: Activities of GEF	18–19	4
	F. Strengthening the secretariat	20–21	5
III.	Future programme of work	22–23	5

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I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-first session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 51/183 of 16 December 1996, in which it requested the Secretary-General: (a) to prepare, in 1997, a report on a vulnerability index for small island developing States in collaboration with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other relevant United Nations and non-United Nations organizations; (b) to seek the views of Governments on the creation of an informal open-ended working group within the existing International Framework of Action for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, with a view to ensuring full integration and participation of small island developing States in the mapping of a disaster reduction strategy and in improving access to disaster and warning information; (c) to maintain the Small Island Developing States Unit within the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, which has since merged into the new Department of Economic and Social Affairs, at an appropriate level of staff and to improve the structure and organization of the Unit, in accordance with resolution 49/122 of 19 December 1994; and (d) to implement fully the relevant provisions of resolution 49/122 regarding a strengthened capacity of UNCTAD to carry out the research and analysis necessary to complement the work of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In addition, the Assembly requested the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, in its coordinating role, to look into appropriate modalities for mobilizing resources for the effective implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States,[1] thereinafter referred to as the Programme of Action.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with Governments, to continue to implement fully all provisions of resolution 49/122 in order to operationalize the Small Island Developing States Technical Assistance Programme (SIDSTAP) and the Small Island Developing States Information Network (SIDSNET). The Assembly also called upon the international community, including the Global Environment Facility (GEF), to support commercial energy development in small island developing States, and requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-second session a progress report on the particular actions taken to implement the resolution. The present report has been prepared in response to that request. It is based on information provided by the relevant organizations and describes actions taken as at July 1997.

II. Review of progress

A. Vulnerability index

3. In response to the request of the General Assembly, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs undertook initial studies in order to provide a conceptual framework for the development of a vulnerability index. A background paper was prepared and distributed to small island developing States, organizations of the United Nations system and academic and research institutes for comments in December 1996. The paper provided an analysis of the inherent vulnerabilities of small island developing States, discussed a possible approach to the vulnerability issue, and suggested that consideration be given to the construction of an economic vulnerability index and an ecological vulnerability index, each composed of a number of appropriate indicators.

4. By March 1997 more than 20 responses had been received from Governments, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, regional organizations and research institutes. Those responses were supportive of the main thrust of the background paper. The majority of them also contained observations and suggestions on specific indicators that might be considered for inclusion in the vulnerability index.

5. At its meeting held from 22 to 24 January 1997, Working Group III of the Committee for Development Planning reviewed the background paper and made a number of suggestions on the components of the vulnerability index, which are contained in the Committee's report to the Economic and Social Council on its thirty-first session.[2]

6. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs revised the background paper on the basis of comments and suggestions received from the various commentators. Two consultants have been engaged to evaluate the availability of data, the optimal number of variables to be included in each index, the most appropriate variables to be included and various aggregation methods. That phase of technical work is expected to be completed by November 1997. An expert group meeting is planned for early December in New York, at which time the results of the technical work will be reviewed.

7. Working Group III of the Committee for Development Planning, which will meet in New York from 17 to 19 December 1997, will review the results of the technical work and the outcome of the expert group meeting and will, as requested by the General Assembly in resolution 51/183, submit its views and recommendations on the issue to the

Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session and to the Committee at its thirty-second session, both of which will transmit the outcome of their deliberations to the Assembly at its fifty-third session through the Economic and Social Council.

B. Modalities for resource mobilization

8. Regarding the mobilization of resources to facilitate the implementation of the Programme of Action, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs undertook consultations with representatives of the Alliance of Small Island States in New York and with organizations within the United Nations system in the first quarter of 1997. On the basis of the consultations, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs decided that one way to facilitate the mobilization of additional external resources would be through a meeting of donors and representatives of small island developing States. To improve the likelihood that such a meeting would result in tangible outcomes, the small island developing States have been requested to prepare a portfolio of documents on priority projects in the areas covered by the Programme of Action that cannot be implemented without the support of external resources beyond those currently envisaged.

9. In view of the low technical capacity of a number of small island developing States, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs took the initiative to explore the possibility of their obtaining technical assistance in preparing project documents from regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations, selected United Nations organizations and research institutions working on issues related to small island developing States. The response to that initiative was encouraging. Fourteen organizations have offered to assist small island developing States on request. UNDP agreed to assume responsibility for coordinating requests for technical assistance by small island developing States at the regional and subregional levels. In keeping with that decision, small island developing States have been invited to channel their requests through regional or subregional offices of UNDP that have been designated by the UNDP Administrator. Those offices will also be responsible for coordinating the efforts of cooperating organizations assisting small island developing States in the preparation of project documents.

10. In July 1997, the Secretariat wrote to small island developing States, inviting them to prepare project portfolios for presentation at a donors' conference. Concurrently, the Secretariat notified prospective bilateral and multilateral donors of that initiative. The date of the meeting of representatives of small island developing States with prospective donors, to be called by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with UNDP, will depend on the progress small island developing States make in preparing their project portfolios.

C. Small island developing States technical assistance programme and information network

11. In addition to the activities supported by UNDP at the country, regional and interregional levels, the activities undertaken by UNDP in the context of follow-up to the Programme of Action include the preparation of a technical assistance programme covering the 14 chapters of the Programme of Action, the completion of a four-volume directory of experts on small island developing States and institutions designed to facilitate the use of the capacities of those States in the implementation of the Programme of Action and an assessment of the needs of the Caribbean small island developing States in areas such as productivity enhancement, industrial standardization, telecommunications, port management, civil aviation and computer technology.

12. During the period under review, UNDP also launched a pilot information network for small island developing States that will provide them with the capacity to exchange information through the Internet, for example, interactive calendars, forums, mailing lists, Web directory, databases of contacts and other features. It will focus on three chapters of the Programme of Action — those concerning tourism resources, coastal and marine resources and energy resources — and will be managed by centres of excellence in each region. In the context of capacity enhancement for regional training institutions, at the request of UNDP, the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization conducted initial training sessions with selected regional institutions of small island developing States. Lead training institutions were identified, and training sessions were held in Barbados, Fiji and the Seychelles.

D. Natural disasters

13. Following the discussions on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction at the fifty-first session of the

General Assembly, the secretariat of the Decade launched a consolidation process for the remainder of the Decade (1997-1999) by developing a comprehensive and structured action plan. The action plan involves all relevant partners within the Decade's International Framework of Action and is based on consultations with Member States, intergovernmental organizations, the Decade's Scientific and Technical Committee, national committees and focal points, and other relevant international organizations as well as scientific and technical institutions and non-governmental organizations.

14. Consolidation activities within the United Nations system are closely coordinated by the United Nations Steering Committee for the Decade. Regional approaches evaluating the Decade's achievements and defining a disaster reduction strategy for the twenty-first century are key to the Decade's overall success. In that respect, the vulnerability of small island developing States and their requirements for effective disaster reduction capacities and measures will obtain priority consideration, in line with the recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session and those of the General Assembly in resolution 51/183.

15. The consultations on the Decade's consolidation programme focus in particular on the Programme of Action. The Scientific and Technical Committee includes membership from Jamaica and Tonga. As part of the Decade's inter-agency coordination activities, specific concerns of the small island developing States are represented in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the World Meteorological Organization and its Typhoon Committee, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the World Health Organization and UNDP. The secretariat collaborates closely with regional and intergovernmental organizations, such as the Pan American Health Organization, the Caribbean Community, the Organization of American States and the South Pacific Forum.

16. The Programme of Action is also considered within the Decade's implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/117 B of 20 December 1995, on early-warning capacities for natural disasters and similar events with adverse effects on the environment. The Decade's secretariat is in consultation with several donor countries on project proposals to reduce vulnerability in support of sustainable development and for the improvement of early-warning systems, which include specific pilot activities in small island developing States. The project will take into consideration the recommendations made by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session.

17. The South Pacific Programme Office of the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs represents the Decade in the Pacific region and has organized several regional disaster management meetings under the auspices of the Decade. The South Pacific Disaster Reduction Programme, implemented by the South Pacific Programme Office in 18 Pacific States, receives coordinated support from all bilateral donors active in the Pacific.

E. Energy in small island developing States: Activities of GEF

18. The GEF operational strategy has been developed to guide it in the preparation of country-driven projects. The GEF operational strategy in climate change incorporates the policy guidance of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The strategic thrust of GEF-financed climate change activities is to support sustainable measures that minimize damage by reducing the risk or the adverse effects of climate change. GEF finances long-term measures, enabling activities and short-term mitigation projects.

19. The long-term measures are prepared in the context of the operational programmes in the area of climate change and include the removal of barriers to energy conservation and energy efficiency, the promotion of renewable energy by reducing implementation costs and the reduction of the long-term costs of low greenhouse gas-emitting energy technologies. All three of these operational programmes are supporting the development of environmentally sound, renewable sources of commercial energy with demonstrated viability and the improvement of the efficiency of existing technologies and end-use equipment based on conventional energy sources. GEF has funded two projects for small island developing States in the above-mentioned areas: a demand side management demonstration for Jamaica and a sugar bio-energy technology project for Mauritius. The Facility has financed a number of other projects and project preparation activities, which are directly and/or indirectly supporting commercial energy development and efficiency improvement in small island developing States. A number of these are enabling activities – priority activities identified by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. So far small island developing States have benefited from the following projects:

(a) Regional planning for adaptation to climate change: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint.Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago;

(b) Pacific Island Climate Change Assistance Project: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu;

(c) Country projects: Cape Verde, Maldives, Papua New Guinea and Seychelles.

F. Strengthening the secretariat

20. The General Assembly, in resolution 51/183, requested the Secretary-General to maintain the Small Island Developing States Unit within the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (now part of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs) at an appropriate level of staff and to improve the structure and organization of the Unit, and to implement fully relevant provisions of resolution 49/122 regarding the strengthened capacity of UNCTAD to carry out the research and analysis necessary to complement the work of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In the context of the reform proposals presented in the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/950), priority attention is attached to reinforcing areas of work related to small island developing States. Thus, in the organization of the new Department of Economic and Social Affairs, it is proposed to strengthen suitably the Small Island Developing States Unit in the Division for Sustainable Development and to enhance its capacity to provide advisory services to small island developing States. At its ninth session, in April and May 1996, UNCTAD decided to continue to support small island developing countries in the framework of the Programme of Action and in accordance with the relevant provisions of resolution 49/122. To that end, a post at the P-4 level has been established in the Office of the Special Coordinator for Least Developed, Landlocked and Island Developing Countries following the recent restructuring of UNCTAD.

21. The ongoing work of UNCTAD in support of the implementation of the Programme of Action consists of: (a) preparation of a background study on external shocks and the vulnerability of small island developing States as an input to the expert group meeting on vulnerability indices planned by Department of Economic and Social Affairs for early December 1997; (b) preparation of a forthcoming publication entitled *Small Island Developing States: Issues of Globalization, Specialization and Regional Cooperation*; (c) construction of trade efficiency indices relevant to small island developing States; and (d) direct assistance to small island developing States in the preparation of economic and trade-related projects for submission to the donors' conference to be convened by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with UNDP.

III. Future programme of work

22. At its fifth session, in 1997, the Commission on Sustainable Development adopted resolution 5/1 on the modalities for the full and comprehensive review of the Programme of Action.[3] In that context it decided to undertake the review of the outstanding chapters and issues of the Programme of Action at its sixth session, in 1998. Furthermore, it recommended that the General Assembly convene a two-day special session immediately preceding its fifty-fourth session, in 1999, for an in-depth assessment and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action. The Commission also decided that it would carry out the full review of the Programme of Action within its approved programme of work at its seventh session, which would serve as the preparatory process for the special session of the Assembly in 1999. At its nineteenth special session, devoted to an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, the Assembly endorsed the recommendation of the Commission and noted that the special session of the Assembly on issues related to small island developing States would represent a significant contribution to achieving the objectives of the Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

23. As requested in paragraph 10 of General Assembly resolution 50/116, a report on the plans, programmes and projects for the sustainable development of small island developing States that have been implemented in response to the Programme of Action, as well as those that are under implementation and those that are envisaged for implementation within five years of the date of the report, will be submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-third session, in 1998.

Notes

[1] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April-6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 94.I.18 and Corr.1 and 2).

[2] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 15* (E/1997/35).

[3] *Ibid., Supplement No. 9* (E/1997/29), chap. I.